DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 247 760 FL 014 528

AUTHOR Wenden, Anita L.
TITLE Learner Training for L2 Learners: A Selected Review of Content and Method.
PUB DATE Mar 83
NOTE 39p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (17th, Toronto, Ontario, March 16-19, 1983).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; Curriculum Development; Educational Strategies; *Learning Processes; *Learning Strategies; Literature Reviews; *Second Language Instruction; *Second Language Learning

ABSTRACT

It is suggested, based on research findings on learner strategies, that second language curriculum planners and teachers can and should provide students with opportunities to refine their learning skills. This can be accomplished by expanding their repertoire of learning strategies and refining their awareness of aspects of language learning. A review of some past and present practice in these techniques, called learner training, reveals three basic approaches varying in the degree to which they require teacher intervention: (1) autonomous learner training and language training; (2) learner training provided by the teacher, coupled with language training done autonomously; and (3) learner and language training both provided by the teacher. The three approaches are outlined and the curricular content and impact of the approaches on attitudes, student learning approach, and learning efficiency are discussed. (MSE)

Learner Training for L2 Learners:
A Selected Review of Content and Method [1]

Anita L. Wenden

York College of the City University of New York

Recent research on learner strategies has made it clear that learners are actively, deliberately involved in their learning process. (Wenden 1983 reviews the literature.) These research findings point to a second task for curriculum planners and facilitators of second-language learning. Besides helping learners to learn about language and to use language to communicate effectively (language training), opportunities must be provided that will enable them to refine their competence as learners, i.e. expand their repertoire of language learning strategies and refine their awareness about various aspects of their language learning (learner training). This paper will review some of the past and present practice in learner training to suggest how learner training may be approached--content and method. Specifically, three basic approaches to learner training will be illustrated. The content of a curricular component based on the projects described will be outlined and their impact will be summarized. In the concluding section, further reasons for incorporating learner training into the curriculum will be presented.

1. Paper presented at the annual TESOL conference. March, 1983.

Learner Training for Learners of a Second Language: A Selected Review of Content and Method

Recent research on learner strategies has made it clear that learners are actively, deliberately involved in their learning process in varying degrees.[1] This research has shown learners to be capable of reflecting upon how language works, and upon how their feelings, personalities, cultural backgrounds, social roles and learning styles impact upon their learning. It has also begun to provide us with information on the assumptions about language and language learning which learners bring to the learning process and on how they diagnose their language problems and plan their learning. Finally, the research has documented strategies learners utilize, and the manner in which they evaluate their usefulness.

These research findings point to a second task for curriculum planners and facilitators of second-language learning. It is no longer sufficient to help learners to learn about language and to use language to communicate effectively (language training). Opportunities must also be provided that will enable them to refine their perceptions about various aspects of their language learning experience AND to expand their repertoire of

[1] Wenden 1983 reviews the research on learner strategies

language learning behaviors (learner training).[2] In other words, it is being suggested that both the process and content of learning be taken into account in the planning of curriculum so that learners' competence as learners may be nurtured, developed and refined. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to review past and present practice in learner training, to the extent that it has been reported on in the literature The review does not pretend to be exhaustive. Rather it is suggestive of what learner training consists of and how it may be approached--the content and method--and, to a limited extent,[3] of how research findings on learner strategies have been applied. Three different approaches to learner training will be described and illustrated. The content of a curricular component in learner training based on these approaches will, then, be outlined and the impact of the projects described will be summarized. In the concluding section, further reasons for incorporating learner training into the curriculum will be presented

APPROACHES TO LEARNER TRAINING

[2] See Allright 1981, Dickinson 1980, and Holec 1980 for a similar use of the term.
[3] I say "to a limited extent" since only a few of the projects to be described have been based upon or guided by research findings.

Approaches to learner training can be distinguished by the extent to which they require learner autonomy or, conversely, teacher intervention.

1 Learner training and language training are done autonomously. Handbooks and practical guides, written to encourage and guide individuals who are considering or, actually, learning another language for enjoyment, for educational or for professional reasons are one example of this approach. Written, primarily, as guides to independent study, they provide learners with guidelines on how to learn another language. Learners are expected to interpret these guidelines themselves and to use them to learn the language on their own. Of course, writers do not exclude the possibility that learners will seek the help of a teacher to learn the language and so, provide ample advice on how best to utilize his/her services. (Sweet 1899, Cummings 1916, Crawford 1930, Cornelius 1955, Nida 1957, Politzer 1965, Kraft Kraft 1966 Hall 1966, Moulton 1966, Pei 1966, Pimsleur 1980; Rubin and Thompson 1982, Cohen and Hosenfeld-forthcoming). While one may assume that all of these writings reflect the experience of the writers and their informal observation of language learners, some are especially concerned to demonstrate the changes in the approach to and techniques of language learning suggested by modern linguistic analysis.(Nida, Politzer, Hall, Moulton) Others, based upon recent

research on learner strategies, especially those utilized by successful language learners, intend to expand the language learner's repertoire of efficient learning strategies. (Rubin and Thompson; Cohen and Hosenfeld)

Generally, the writers try to correct some of the assumptions people bring to the task of language learning by discussing one or several of the following questions:

1. Who can learn another language ? What are the intellectual, psychological and sociocultural predispositions necessary for success ? Does age affect one's ability to learn ?
2. Why should one study another language ?
3. How long does it take to learn another language ? How much of it can one be expected to master ? and how well ?
4. How does one learn another language ? Where is a second language best learned ? Which is the best method ?
5. Which language should one learn ?

Varying detail on the nature of language is also provided. The term "language" is defined and, in some cases, its component systems are analysed. Learners are cautioned about the arbitrariness and illogicality of language rules and about the surface dissimilarities

between languages. The problems that can arise from these characteristics of language are, then, pointed out. Some handbooks also refer to the differences between the spoken and written language, and others include a separate discussion of the nature of communication.

Each of the writers provides learners with advice on how to learn another language either in the form of general guidelines (strategies in a broad sense) or of specific techniques (strategies in a narrow sense) or both. Learners are asked to wipe away all preconceptions about the language they are going to learn; advised to get to know themselves as language learners; told what to learn and in what order; encouraged to follow the example of successful language learners; reminded of the importance of imitating, listening, overlearning; cautioned to avoid thinking in their native language and to have clear objectives; exhorted to be persistent and creative in their efforts to learn and to take every opportunity to use the language.

Techniques for learning are also offered. Some authors list techniques for learning vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, others suggest how learners can improve their ability to speak, write, read and listen to the language. Others, still, tell learners what to do to learn from their errors, to remember, and to evaluate

their progress. Learners are also told how to choose and utilize a wide array of language learning resources (e.g. teachers, tutors, informants, textbooks, dictionaries, formal language courses, records, movies, reading materials....). In some cases, the limitations of these resources are pointed out. To my knowledge, the effectiveness of these manuals in improving a learner's learning and language skills has not been tested.

Questionnaires and evaluation forms which provide learners with language learning objectives, lists of suggested resources, and techniques for assessing their progress are another example of this first approach. Holec (1981) reports on how such a questionnaire was used with a group of foreign teachers of English at the University of Stirling. Holec does not evaluate this experiment for its merits as a technique in learner training but as an interesting but incomplete experiment in self-directed learning. He reasons that while learners were responsible for the planning, monitoring and assessment of their learning, the framework within which these decisions were made was not determined by themselves but by their teachers. The evaluation form of communicative competence for language learners (Fantini et al 1980), one of the techniques for learner training developed by members of the faculty at the Experiment in International Living (Vermont), is a similar type form. [4]

2 Learner training is provided by the teacher and language training is done autonomously. In this case teachers provide learner training while students are learning the language on their own. Projects which utilize this approach are usually referred to as experiments in self-directed learning , for their immediate objective is to train learners to take full charge of all aspects of their language learning.

The CRAPEL (Centre de Recherches et D'applications Pédagogiques en Langues), a research and language training center at the University of Nancy (France), has been committed to the training of learners for autonomy since the early seventies. Learner training is conducted, for the greater part, through discussions with a helper. These discussions may take the form of a private interview or be conducted in a group class situation. During initial sessions with the helper, learners discuss the differences between teacher-directed learning and self-directed learning--psychological preparation. They are helped to identify their learning needs, to set objectives, to discover their preferred mode of learning, and given training in how to exploit the resources they

[4] See Larsen-Freeman (1983) for a detailed description of the educative process whereby graduate teachers can develop their competence as learners AND of techniques utilized at the Experiment in International living to develop this competence.

decide to use--methodological preparation. Later meetings with the helper are used to train learners to evaluate their progress, reformulate objectives, choose new resources and, generally, to discuss any learning and language problems they may have. Besides the guidance received from the helper, many of the handouts that accompany cassettes and print resources have self-teaching hints written into them.

CRAPEL'S first experiment with learner training (Abe, Henner-Stanchina, Smith 1975) was with a group of professionals (26 in the first year and 30 in the second year). Most of them had specific communicative needs (e.g. to direct a factory at an overseas location with English speaking colleagues, to give a speech at a professional conference, to keep up with professional literature). Some knew very little English; others were more advanced. They came to the language center for learner training and for the resources they needed for their language learning. Once the initial training had been completed, they were expected to determine the time, place, method and pace of their learning and to arrange for meetings with the helper.

Their second experiment was in an engineering college. The students who participated in the experiment pursued engineering courses and some of their other

English courses in a traditional manner while self-directing one component of their English program. (Abe, Henner-Stanchina, and Smith 1975; Moulden 1978, 1980). In the first year (1975) advanced students (in English) in their third and fourth year at the college were given responsibility for training themselves in listening comprehension while completing an apprenticeship in industrial training. In the second year (1978-79) thirteen intermediate students of English in their second and third year at the college were expected to take charge of two hours of the three and one half hour course in oral expression. Two hours per week were set aside for self-directed work. Students worked on objectives and materials of their choice when, where, and how they pleased and saw a helper for about 20 minutes per week. The other hour and a half was set aside for teacher-directed activities. In 1980 the experiment was extended to include four groups of students (effective usable sample of 32). The procedure followed with the previous group of intermediate students was followed except that one hour per week of individual self-directed learning was replaced by one hour per week of small group self-directed learning. Altogether, the experiments with the intermediate group included about 20% of the total body of intermediate students registered in the school.

Their third experiment was in group self-directed learning with 50 to 60 senior citizens interested in improving their English for a variety of reasons--to travel, participate in conversations, take advantage of English programs offered on TV and radio newspaper. (Riley and Sicre 1978)[5] Interviews with the helper and questionnaires have yielded the following tentative conclusions about self-directed learning.

1. The success of self-directed learning is directly proportionate to learner motivation. Learners with specific linguistic goals or those who were learning English for personal enjoyment were most receptive to self-directed learning. Unmotivated learners dropped out and/or did not do the tasks.

2. Successful self-directed learning does not require a certain level of linguistic proficiency. The more advanced learners were not necessarily the most successful.

3. Engineering students who self-directed their training in listening comprehension learned to solve language problems on their own and to objectively assess their work apart from the helper.

[5] Most recent experiments at the CRAPEL are focusing on the interaction between the helper and the learner.

4. Engineering students who participated in the 1980 experiment maintained that a blend of whole group communication with a teacher, small group and individual self-directed learning was 1.2 to 3 times more effective and pleasant than traditional learning. Moreover, of the three arrangements for learning, individual self-directed learning lead to the greatest progress.

Of course, the above conclusions point directly to the workability and efficiency of self-directed learning. However, by implication, they can be extended to learner training. If, for example, unmotivated learners do not like to self-direct their learning, they would, probably, not be receptive to learner training that would prepare them to do so. Moreover, to the extent that learners at any level of linguistic proficiency (from beginning to advanced) can succeed at self-directed learning, to that same extent will they be able to profit from the learner training that makes self-directed learning efficient and successful. And, finally, the fact that individual self-directed learning was considered more efficient underlines the necessary function of learner training--if not for the more successful language learner who seems to have a natural aptitude for learning how to learn, certainly for the less successful.

In the English Language Teaching Journal (1982) Allright reports upon a three - week seminar for research scientists at the Polish Academy of Sciences which provided both learner training and language training. A few weeks preceding the seminar, prospective members were sent a letter describing the nature of the course and asked to arrive with some ideas about their learning priorities and their preferred ways of learning English. During introductory workshops, students were asked to complete personal profile sheets of their learning needs and of their preferred language learning strategies. At subsequent interviews learners' stated priorities were clarified. Then they were presented with the general outline of the course and asked to decide whether and how it needed to be adapted to meet their personal priorities.

The course structure was divided between class time, self-access time and private consultation time. Class time was not completely occupied by traditional language learning activities. Sometime was set aside to deal with language or learning problems learners raised during the private consultation time. Training for decision-making regarding how to make best use of self-access time was also done during class time. Halfway through the course, learners were re-interviewed and asked to evaluate current course activities , their progress and to reformulate their learning priorities--changing them if

necessary. The purpose of this mid-term review was to train learners in the monitoring and evaluating that precedes decision-making regarding learning priorities. (In fact, it also revealed their satisfaction with the course.)

3 Both learner training and language training are provided by the teacher. Projects which utilize this approach are usually done within the context of teacher-directed courses in second languages. In these courses, the learner training is integrated with language training. While students master the linguistic content of the course, they improve their language learning skills.

The course materials prepared by Wenden are one example of the approach described above. Through a series of mini-lectures, readings, in-class comprehension exercises and discussions, and out-of-class learning tasks , students are familiarized with the following concepts: self-directed learning, language shock, cultural learning differences, learning strategies, a learning objective, and learning theories. They are also provided with tasks that enable them to practice the following skills: selective listening, recognizing and dealing with their reactions to language learning; diagnosing their learning needs; selecting appropriate learning objectives, resources, and strategies; evaluating these resources and

strategies. At the same time, these activities provide students opportunities to gain fluency in their oral-aural skills.

The materials were first tried in the summer of 1982 at Columbia University's language institute with very advanced students of various cultural backgrounds. The students were registered for a seven-week intensive program in English. Two of the sixteen class hours a week were set aside for learner training. At the end of the session a questionnaire was administered to determine students' evaluations. The following summary represents the opinions of 19 of the 23 students who participated in the training about (1) the usefulness of such training and (2) whether it had affected their approach to language learning. More than 50% of the group agreed that the tasks that constituted the training had been useful. However, when asked why the training was considered useful, only five of the students gave reasons related to learner training although their answers to a previous question regarding the purpose of the class evidenced a clear understanding of its objectives. Less than 50% felt the usefulness of the sessions lay in the fact that they could practice their English or some other language goal. They did not think learner training was necessary. Seven indicated that they had changed their approach somewhat and five that they had learned something they did not know

before. The others said that they had not learned anything they did not already know.

This experiment has led to the following tentative conclusions. First of all, learner training may be more relevant to the needs of intermediate to high-intermediate students. Of the two groups of students who began the training in 1982, one group was so resistant that the training was not continued except with a small group of seven after regular class time. However, these students chose to come as much for the opportunity to practice English which was afforded in such a small group as for the actual learner training. As for the other group of students who did participate, they were generally cooperative, but there was something almost mechanical about their participation. Both groups acknowledged that it was useful to talk about how to learn English, but this did not seem to be perceived as a great need.

The experiment has also highlighted the importance of psychological preparation. Students should be prepared for this new role in their learning. Some of the students who wished to have the training discontinued, for example, had very specific linguistic needs and they expected that the teacher would help them with these needs not train them to help themselves. They were not ready for this responsibility, or perhaps, as subsequent use of the

material with other groups has shown, they did not have the time to take it on. The views of a young Japanese business man who chose to come to the training sessions offered outside the class suggests an even more basic reason for the disinterest and resistance. He had just been assigned to the New York office and given the summer to prepare himself to deal with his American clients. He chose to come to the training sessions offered outside of class, therefore, because it gave him an opportunity to practice his speaking. He did not feel that the learner training would be of any use to him once he started work although it was quite clear he would not have achieved the communicative competence in the language he so needed. In other words, the relevance of learner training is not so readily perceived. Therefore, for adults, who approach learning very pragmatically, who have limited time and money to achieve their linguistic goals, and who have set expectations about what should happen in a classroom, psychological preparation is essential. Such preparation should include not only an examination of the roles and responsibilities in the classroom but also a demonstration of the relevance of learner training to the achievement of their linguistic objectives. Moreover, courses that incorporate learner training should be so advertised or decisions to include such activities in a course that learners believe to have other purposes should be negotiated with the learners.

Learner training is one of the three objectives of the field work component of the course work designed for pre-intermediate and intermediate students enrolled in the College ESL program at York College (CUNY). The other two purposes of the field work are to encourage students to use English outside the classroom and to increase their general knowledge about the culture, the many institutions in the city and the services they offer, and about their college community. To this end, students are assigned information-getting tasks that require them to meet and talk with members of the college community, other than the ESL faculty and their friends, AND/or with personnel that staff a variety of social and cultural institutions in the city. The fourth phase of each field work project focuses especially on learner training. Besides being asked to write up the information they have gathered, students are given a question which requires them to reflect upon one aspect of their learning, e.g. difficulties they had understanding; strategies they used to communicate; what they learned. These written reflections are, then, shared with the class during a time especially set aside for this purpose. Once students feel comfortable sharing these experiences, teachers are encouraged to have them "reflect upon their initial reflections" so that they may (1) suggest ways of dealing with the problems encountered; (2) evaluate the strategies they have used. The program is just in its beginning stages and so, it is too early to

evaluate the impact of the field work.

The two projects described above are somewhat broad in scope--attempting to raise learner awareness about varied aspects of their language learning experience AND to refine and diversify their learning skills. Other projects, which have incorporated learner training with language training, have focused on one particular skill and related awareness. For example, Rubin and Henze (1981) describe how learner training may be incorporated into the foreign language requirement of TESOL teacher training programs through directed diary studies which require students to note the learning strategies they employ (using a schedule of strategies as a guide), categorize them and evaluate their learning preferences. Such an activity can (1) provide students with concrete experience on how learner strategies vary with the situation and (2) lead students to take charge of their learning and (3) generally, give them good insights into their entire learning process. Henze, the learner in the study reported on, maintained that this activity helped her (1) focus her learning (2) evaluate her own learning strategies and (3) become aware of her learning process, including the strategies she used most frequently.

At the Bournemouth Eurocenter(Great Britain), learners are trained in self-assessment through courses in which the teacher and teaching play their traditional roles as a beginning toward a system of instruction that would be self-directed. (Holec 1981) Training consists of the following steps: (1) learners act out and record a simple transaction (2) teachers provide explanation regarding the significant elements of spoken English (3) learners practice and make a second recording (4) they listen to both recordings and compare them asking themselves "what did I say ?" and "how did I say it ?" These assessments may be done in class or as oral homework and are followed by a report to the class. Evaluation of this experiment has shown that this training refines and improves students' judyments. Moreover, the standards of performance achieved by students after a period of training shows significant progress beyond their performance when they first begin. All students agreed that the training was useful. It enabled them to learn and think more and helped them do more for themselves. (See Oskaarsson 1978 for other approaches to self-assessment.)

Hosenfeld et al (1981) describe a curricular sequence for teaching reading strategies which was used in four different foreign language classrooms in Western New York. The sequence consists of the seven following steps:

(1) teach students to think aloud while reading; (2) identify students' reading strategies; (3) help students to understand the concept of "strategy " and to recognize that some strategies are successful, some unsuccessful, and others only "seemingly" successful; (4) help students to identify strategies that they use to decode native language texts containing unknown words; (5) help students to identify strategies that they CAN use to decode foreign language texts containing unknown words; (6) provide instruction/practice/integration for specific reading strategies ; and (7) identify students'reading strategies and compare them to the strategies students used before instruction.

The literature also includes a few accounts of controlled experiments, the purpose of which is to train learners in the skills that are measured in language aptitude tests. (Politzer and Weiss 1969 ; Hatfield 1965) The experiment conducted by P olitzer and Weiss was to determine whether aptitude as measured by standard foreign language aptitude tests (the Pimsleur LAB and the Carroll-Sapon MLAT) could be increased by training and whether such increases would result in better achievement in foreign language study. In the first phase of the experiment, training materials based primarily on the MLAT and consisting of auditory discriminating drills (recordings) and elements of language structure

(self-instructional booklet) were used in the Defense Language Institute West and in various high schools in the San Francisco Bay area. The achievement of the experimental training group in language aptitude and criterion tests before and after the training was compared with the achievement on both these tests of control groups that had simply continued to learn language without training. In the second phase, training materials emphasized the development of inductive language learning and reasoning ability. Experimental classes (3 pairs of Junior High School classes) received aptitude training while the control classes were exposed to cultural materials. Both groups were learning the foreign language at the same time. In addition, the aptitude training was offered to a group of classes which concentrated on the acquisition of study skills rather than on the study of any specific foreign language.

Conclusions based on the outcome of the training indicated that (1) combined aptitude training and language study are not significantly superior to language study alone in increasing either aptitude or achievement in foreign language; (2) aptitude training without language learning can also lead to a measurable and significant increase in language aptitude--increases in scores shown by the study skills classes nearly equalled the gains made by the foreign language classes.[6]

CONTENT OF LEARNER TRAINING

The content included in the activities of the projects described in the previous section may be summarized in terms of three general objectives and their related concepts and skills (Figure 1).

OBJECTIVE 1: Awareness raising about (1) how language works; (2) the accuracy and appropriateness of how one (as learner) performs (3) how one (as learner) reacts to the language learning process; (4) what one (as learner) believes about how to learn language

Concepts. An understanding of (1) language form--the meaning and function of structural devices or signals (2) language function and social setting--the fact that language structures can be used for more than one purpose and that the choice of language is determined by the setting. (3) language shock--the reaction to being in an environment where one is not familiar with the main

[6] For other techniques and activities that provide learner training within the context of the second language classroom see Cardy 1978; Laforge 1979; Hosenfeld 1979; Riley 1980; Stern 1980; Kraus-Srebic et al 1981; Wenden 1983a,b. For other resources and/or techniques that can be applied to learner training in the second language classroom, see Miller 1964; Knowles 1973; Harri-Augstein and Thomas 1977; Norman 1977; Harri-Augstein 1978; Harrison 1978; Omaggio 1981.

language of communication ; (4) cultural learning differences--the fact that one's approach to learning is culture-conditioned; (5) theory--subconscious or unarticulated assumptions we have developed on the basis of training and experience that allow us to predict how things work and condition us to expect things to work in a certain way; (6) learning style--one's preferred approach to learning.

Skills (1) selective listening--focusing on predetermined aspects of language (2) selective observing--focusing on predetermined aspects of non verbal language (3) diagnosing--the determining the accuracy and appropriateness of one's linguistic performance, i.e. self-assessment; (4) coping with feelings--the ability to recognize and devise strategies to deal with one's reactions to language learning; (5) evaluating learning style and theory--critical analysis of one's beliefs about and preferred approach to language learning.

OBJECTIVE 2:Decision making about what to learn and how

Concepts (1) self-directed learning--what is involved in taking charge of one's learning, its advantages, and how this differs from teacher-directed learning; (2) learning objective--a statement of one's

intent to achieve a specific linguistic skill; (3) learning resources--opportunities within one's environment for learning/improving one's linguistic skills; (4) learning strategies--techniques for utilizing the learning resources.

Skills (1) determining linguistic/communicative needs--translating one's purposes for learning a second language to specific linguistic requirements; (2) determining and prioritizing objectives--translating linguistic requirements into specific statements of desired achievement and identifying those that are considered most important and/or require more time and effort; (2) choosing resources and strategies--identifying opportunities for learning and ways of utilizing them; (3) evaluating resources and strategies--determining the effectiveness of the resources and strategies chosen; (4) reformulating objectives--changing or modifying objectives.

OBJECTIVE 3: Providing opportunities to use concepts and practice skills AND to experiment with learning resources and strategies. [7]

[7] For other suggestions regarding the content of learner training see Dickinson and Carver 1980; Holec 1981. Also see Larsen-Freeman (1983) for a discussion of the importance of awareness-raising.

FIGURE 1

CONTENT OF LEARNER TRAINING

OBJECTIVES	CONCEPTS	SKILLS
AWARENESS RAISING	language form language function/setting language shock learning theory learning style	selective listening selective observing diagnosing (self-assessment) coping with feelings evaluating learning style/theory
DECISION MAKING	self-directed learning learning objectives learning resources learning strategies	identifying learning needs determining objectives prioritizing objectives choosing resources/strategies evaluating resources and strategies
PROVIDING PRACTICE		

IMPACT OF LEARNER TRAINING

I have described some past and present endeavors in learner training to demonstrate what learner training consists of and how it may be approached. I have also outlined the content of a curricular component in learner training suggested by these endeavors. The evidence on the impact of learner training provided by these same endeavors, however, is limited and tentative, for not all of the projects described actually included an evaluative component. Still, those that did have provided us with some information on the impact of learner training upon learner attitudes, approach to learning, and efficiency of learning.

Attitudes. The projects in self-directed learning have shown that learners are receptive to learning on their own and, by implication, to learner training that enables them to do so. As CRAPEL's first experiment moved into its second year, for example, it was noted that more people chose to learn English autonomously because they preferred to do so and not because there was no other way for them to learn English. Moreover, the drop-out rate in this experiment was no higher than it was in traditional evening classes. The engineers who participated in the 1980 experiment maintained that the blend of small group and individual self-directed learning was more pleasant

than traditional learning. While some of the learners reported on by Wenden were resistant to participating in learner training activities, fifty percent of the group did acknowledge its usefulness. As for those who resisted, they highlighted the importance of psychological preparation--of making learners aware of the relevance of the role change that is the outcome of learner training and of enabling them to take on the responsibility for their learning that is a part of this new role. It should also be acknowledged that the purpose of this first project was as much to experiment with method as to determine students' response to the content. Thus students' resistance, attributable in part to these initial attempts to fashion and refine a process, also points to the need for well-developed strategies for learner training.[8]

Approach to learning. Evidence from five of the projects described also indicates that learner training can influence a learner's approach to learning. The first group of CRAPEL engineers, for example, learned to solve

[8] Other student groups with whom the materials have since been used have not been resistant although they vary in the enthusiasm of their response. This is partly because they do not always perceive its relevance and partly because they have limited time to give to the out-of-class activities so essential to the training.

language problems on their own and to objectively assess their work apart from the helper. About twenty-five percent of the students in the Columbia University project gave examples of how their approach to language learning had been diversified. Students at the Eurocenter (Bournemouth) who were trained in self-assessment learned to judge their spoken English more accurately. Henze, who was one of the students who participated in Rubin's directed diary studies, maintained that this activity had helped her focus her learning, evaluate her own learning strategies, and become aware of her learning process, especially the strategies she used most frequently. Pimsleur's experiment demonstrated that students' ability to discriminate sounds and notice grammatical patterns could be developed and refined. Of course, at first glance, the fact that the difference in improvement in aptitude between the group that received the training and the group that did not was not significant seems to suggest that the actual learning of the language is the best training there is. However, it should be noted that the content of the learner training was linguistic form--phonological and grammamtical--and, taking into account language teaching practices prevalent at the time of the experiment, it may be assumed that the content of the language training also focused on linguistic form. The results of this experiment do not, therefore, discount the potential impact of learner training. Rather, it

illustrates how one approach to language teaching by training learners to focus on form does provide training in one of the several sub-objectives that constitute a part of awareness raising, the first main objective of a curricular component in learner training. (cf p. 23)

Efficiency of learning. These projects have yielded very little information on how learner training improves the efficiency of language learning. The engineering students who participated in the 1979-80 experiment at the CRAPEL maintained that individual self-directed learning lead to greater progress than group self-directed learning and teacher-directed learning. However, it is not clear what the cause was--the fact that learners worked independently or the training that prepared them to do so. Nor was their progress actually measured. Pimsleur's subjects, who were actually measured for linguistic achievement, did show some gain, but as was the case with improved aptitude, it was not significantly greater than the gain in achievment of those who did not receive training.

Limited and tentative as these evaluations may be, they do point out the potential of learner training for refining learners' awareness of the language learning process and broaden their range of language learning behaviors. They also tell us where we must direct our future efforts.

Ways of dealing with attitudinal problems must be found, and strategies for learner training must be refined. Once this is done, it will be necessary to determine in a more rigorous manner whether and to what extent such training does modify learners' approach to and improve the efficiency of their learning.

The above-mentioned agenda need not be limited to the researcher on learner strategies. Classroom teachers are urged to incorporate into their lesson plans activities that will help their learners become more aware, critical and resourceful language learners. This paper has attempted to review representative projects in learner training to demonstrate what it consists of and how it may be approached. This information can provide direction. The research on learner strategies can also be considered for guidance. It has demonstrated what successful learners do--what they are aware of, how they plan and the strategies they utilize. The methodologies that have been developed to collect this information can also be utilized by classroom teachers--to determine how their students' help themselves learn. Such knowledge can help them focus the activities in learner training specifically on the needs of their students.

CONCLUSION

In Foreign Language Education: Meeting Individual Needs, (1980:31) Henri Holec , director of the CRAPEL, outlines three main tendencies that have characterized the general pattern of diversification in the pedagogy of second languages since the beginning of the 1960s. The first t' ›--attempts to improve teaching methods and to adapt syllabii to the needs of learners--are not our concern here. The third, a logical extension of the learner-centered trend exemplified by the change in syllabus content, places in perspective and so, gives significance to both the research on learner strategies and its practical applications--the specific concern of this paper. According to Holec this third tendency, "much more recent and, consequently, much less widespread--is an attempt to improve learning both qualitatively and quantitatively by suitably training the learner to learn." This trend, he continues, "calls into question....the idea that there is a direct causal relationship between teaching and learning," and so, "concentrates on improving the learner". Moreover, enabling the learner "to carry out the various steps which make up the learning process" he considers "the best way of insuring that learning take place." Holec's reason for such a claim is that having acquired a satisfactory competence in learning, the learner can construct his own program and so, provide a solution to the problems of differences of needs, conditions and processes. I would like to add another

reason for such a claim--a reason suggested by the research findings in second language acquisition--and in so doing, suggest how learner training acquires a certain urgency when one takes these findings into account.

According to the research in second language acquisition, conditions necessary for the acquisition of a language are: (1) a lowered socio-affective filter; (2) participation in natural communication situations; (3) use of language for meaningful communication; and (4) comprehensible input. (Gingras 1978; Krashen 1977; D'anglejans 1978;) Learner training, which provides learners with opportunities to reflect upon their reactions to and the consequent obstacles they may be putting in the way of their language learning, could provide a context and evoke insights necessary to lowering that socio-affective filter. Moreover, by broadening learners' awareness of available learning resources in their social environment and by giving them an opportunity to experiment with and evaluate strategies for utilizing these resources, such training could provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to become involved in natural communication situations and to transform (at least to some extent) meaningful input into comprehensible input or intake. In other words, learner training could "insure that learning take place" by enabling learners to create the conditions that will facilitate the acquisition

of their second language.

References

Abe, D., Henner-Stanchina, C., and Smith, P. New Approaches to Autonomy: Two Experiments in Self-Directed Learning. Melanges Pedagogiques, CRAPEL 1975, 57-58.

Allwright, H. What do We Want Teaching Materials For ? ELT Journal, 1981 36, 80-82.

Cardy, M. Learning How to Learn: Can It Be Taught ? Canadian Modern Language Journal, 1978, 34

702-707.

Cohen, A. and Hosenfeld, C. Improving L2 Learning. Connecticut: Newbury House (forthcoming 1985).

Cornelius, E.T. Jr. How to Learn a Foreign Language. New York:Thomas Crowell Company, 1955.

Crawford, C.C. and Leitzell, E.M. Learning a New Language. Los Angeles:University of Southern California, 1930.

Cummings, T.F. How To Learn A Language. New York, N.Y., 1916.

D'Anglejans, A. Language Learning in and out of Classrooms. In J.C. Richards (ed.) Understanding Second and Foreign Language Learning: Issues and Approaches Rowley, Mass: Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1969.

Dickinson, L. and Carver, D. Learning How To Learn: Steps Toward Self-Direction in Foreign Language Learning in Schools. ELT Journal, 1980, 35, 1-6.

Fantini, A. , Dant, W., Duarte, S., and Puyana, A. Your Objectives, Guidelines and Assessment: An Evaluation Form of Communicative Competence for Language Learners. Vermont: Experiment In International Living, 1980.

Gingras, R.C. (ed) Second Language Acquisition and Foreign Language Teaching. Center for Applied Linguistics, 1978.

Hall, R., Jr. New Ways to Learn a Foreign Language. Ithaca, N.Y.: Spoken Lbanguage Services, 1973.

Hatfield, W.N. The Effect of Supplemental Training on the Achievement in NInth Grade French of Students Weak in Sound Discrimination and Sound-Symbol Association Skills.

Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University: 1965.

Harri-Augstein, E.S. Reflecting on Structures of Meaning: A PRocess of Learning to Learn. In F. Fransella (ed.), Personal Construct Psychology 1977. New York:Academic Press, 1978, 87-102.

--------. and Thomas, L. Learning How to Learn. In M. Howe, Adult Learning. New York:Wiley and Sons, 1977.

Harrison, R. How to Design and Conduct Self-Directed Learning Experiences. Group and Organization Studies 1978 3 149-166.

Holec, H. Learner Training: Meeting Needs in Self-Directed Learning. In Howard B. Altman and C. Vaughan James (ed.) Foreign Language Teaching: Meeting Individual Needs. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980.

----------. Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning. Prepared for the Council of Europe. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981.

Hosenfeld, C. Learning about Learning: Discovering Our Students' Strategies. Foreign Language Annals. 1979, 12, 51-54.

Knowles, M. Self-Directed Learning: A Guide for Learners and Teachers. New York:Association Press, 1973.

Kraft, C.H. and Kraft, M.E. Where Do I Go From Here?:A Handbook for Continuing Language Study in the Field. U.S. Peace Corps, 1966.

Krashen, S. The Monitor Model for Adult Second Language Performance. In H. Dulay, M. Burt and M. Finnochiaro (eds.) Viewpoints on English as a Second Language. New York: Regents Publishing House Inc., 1977.

Kraus-Srebic, E. Brakus, L., and Kentric, D., A Six-Tiered Cake:: An Experiment with Self-Selected Learning Tasks. ELT Journal, 1981, 36, 19-23.

LaForge, P.G. Reflection in the Context of Community Language Learning. ELT Journal, 1979, 33, 27-253.

Larsen-Freeman, D. Training Teachers or Educating a Teacher Paper presented at the 34th Annual Georgetown University Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics. Washington, D.C. 1983.

**Hosenfeld, C., Arnold,V., Kirchofer, J., Laciura, J. & Wilson, L. Second Language Reading : A Curricular Sequence for Teaching Reading Strategies. Foreign Language Annals 1981 4 415-422.

Miller, H. L. The Autonomous Learner. Teaching and Learning in Adult Education. Chapter 7. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1964.

Moulden, H. Extending Self-Directed Learning of English in an Engineering College. Melanges Ppedagogiques, CRAPEL, 1978, 81-102.

---------. Extending Self-Directed Learning in an Engineering College: Experiment 2. Melanges Pedagogiques, CRAPEL, 1980, 83-116.

Moulton, W.G. A Linguistic Guide to Language Learning. New York:Modern Language Association of America, 1966.

Naiman, N., Frohlick, M., and Stern, H.H. The Good Language Learner. Ontario: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), 1975.

Nida, E. Learning a Foreign Language: A Handbook Prepared Especially for Missionaries. Published by Friendship Press for the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA., 1957.

Norman, D.A. Teaching Learning Strategies. AAAAAAdvanced Research Projects Agency (DOD) Washington, D.C. Office of Naval Research, Arlington, VA., 1977 [ERIC Document No. ED 151 677]

Omaggio, A.C. Successful Language Learners: What Do We Know about Them ? ERIC/CLL News Bulletin, May 1978, 2-3.

----------. Helping Learners Succeed: Activities for the Foreign Language Classroom. Language in Education: Theory and Practice 36 Washington, D.C:Center for Applied Linguistics, 1981.

Oskarsson, M. Approaches to Self-Assessment in Foreign Language Learning. Council of Europe Modern Languages Project. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1978.

Pei, Mario. How to Learn Languages and What Languagess to Learn. New York:Harper Row, 1966.

Pimsleur, P. How to Learn a Foreign Language. Boston, Mass: Heinle and Heinle Publishers, Inc., 1980.

Politzer, R. Foreign Language Learning: A Linguistic Introduction. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965.

____. and Weiss, L. Improving Achievement in Foreign Language Learning. Language and the Teacher: A Series in Applied Linguistics 4. Center for Curriculum

Development, Inc: 1969.

Riley, P. Mud and Stars: Personal Constructs, Sensitization and Learning. Melanges Pedagogiques CRAPEL, 1980, 137-156.

-------- and Sicre, M. An Experiment in Group Self-Directed Learning. Melanges Pedagogiques CRAPEL, 1978.

Rubin J. and Henze, R. The Foreign Language Requirement: A Suggestion to Enhance Its Educational Role in Teacher Training. TESOL Newsletter, 1981, 15 17, 19, 24.

--------. and Thompson, I.How to Be A More Successful Language Learner. Boston, Mass: Heinle and Heinle Publishers, Inc., 1982.

Stern H.H. Language Learning on the Spot: Some Thoughts on the Language Aspects of Student Exchange Programs. Canadian Modern Language Journal, 1980, 36 659-669.

Sweet, H. The Practical Study of Languages. London:Oxford University Press, 1964. (First published by J.M. Dent Sons Ltd., 1899).

Wenden, A.L. The Processes of Intervention: A Selected Review of the Literature. Language Learning, 1983, 33 103-121.

_____. Training Language 2 Learners to Diagnose Language Problems. A paper presented at LaGuardia Community College Professional Development Day, 1983a.

--------. Conversations about Language Learning: Training for Effective L2 Learning. (In Preparation).

----------. Facilitating Autonomy in L2 Learners . TESOL Newsletter, 1983b, 17 6-7.